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**1987 SUMMER USE SURVEY
OF
MINNESOTA STATE PARK VISITORS**

PARK STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF PARK VISITORS

DRAFT

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CONTENTS

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	1
Who Uses the Parks?	1
Why Do Visitors Use the Parks?	4

Introduction

As part of the visitor survey research, 162 park personnel were asked to respond to the visitor survey as they thought visitors would respond. The purpose was to see how perceptions by park personnel of visitors compared with the actual responses of the visitors. Full-time central office and regional office staff, plus full-time and seasonal staff at the parks completed the survey. The return rate was 89%.

For the purpose of this analysis, the survey can be divided into two parts. One part (Sections 1 and 5) deals with visitor demographics and related items. These sections answer the question: Who uses the parks? The other part (Sections 2, 3, and 4) deals with visitor feelings, values, and motivations. These sections answer the question: Why do visitors use the parks?

In comparing responses between staff and visitors, two conclusions can be drawn concerning the above questions:

On the question of "Who uses the parks?": staff perceptions were often inaccurate.

On the question of "Why do visitors use the parks?": staff perceptions were usually accurate.

The latter conclusion demonstrates a common understanding between visitors and park staff of the basic philosophy and management of state parks.

These two conclusions are discussed in the following two sections. Only highlights of the results are discussed. A complete tabulation comparing staff and visitor responses is available for those who wish to analyze these data further. (Note: the comparisons that follow are between total visitors and park staff as presented in the complete tabulation.)

Who uses the parks?

Major differences were found between staff estimates and visitor responses in this area. Contrary to park staff perceptions, the average park visitor is making his/her first visit to the park, may not have spent the previous night at home, and will not camp in the park. More visitors

than estimated by staff will be under 25 or over 44 years old; female; homemakers, students, or retired; and nonresidents of Minnesota. Visitors will also be better educated and make either less than or more than staff estimate. As estimated by staff, most visitors will have an annual State Park vehicle permit, not be members of the Passport Club, and be traveling as a family of two adults and two teens/children. If they camp in the park, they will stay two nights.

The questions analyzed in this section deal with:

- A. Frequency of visits
- B. Type and size of group
- C. Distance traveled
- D. Percent of visitors camping
- E. Permit holders and Passport Club Members
- F. Age
- G. Residence
- H. Sex
- I. Occupation
- J. Education
- K. Income.

- A. Park staff underestimated the number of new visitors to the park and overestimated the frequency of visits to the park. Staff estimated that only 4% of the visitors were first time users of the park, while, in reality, 37% of the visitors were first time users. Staff estimated that 60% of the visitors used the park 3 or more times per year. Only 30% of the visitors used the park 3 or more times per year.
- B. Park staff overestimated the number of families using the park, but correctly estimated the size of groups using the park. Both visitors and staff reported that the majority of visitors traveled as a family (75% visitors vs 91% staff). The difference is explained by more visitors reporting that they traveled alone or with friends. Both visitors and staff reported that the average group consisted of two adults and two teens/children.
- C. Park staff poorly estimated the distance traveled by visitors. Only one-third of the visitors indicated that their permanent home was between 25 and 200 miles from the park. In contrast, staff estimated that over two-thirds of the visitors (70%) lived between 25 and 200 miles from the park. Only 57% of the visitors reported spending the night before

arriving at the park at their permanent home, compared to the staff estimate of 86%.

- D. Park staff overestimated the number of visitors camping in the park. Over three-fourths of the visitors (82%) did not camp overnight in the park. Staff estimated that 61% of the visitors were campers. However, both visitors and staff agreed that the average camper spent two nights in the park.
- E. Park staff underestimated the number of visitors with State Park permits, but they correctly estimated the number of visitors belonging to the Passport Club. More visitors (65% vs 55%) had a current annual Minnesota State Park vehicle permit than staff estimated. Both visitors and staff agreed that less than 20% of the visitors were members of the Passport Club (18% vs 14%, respectively).
- F. Park staff poorly estimated the age of adult park visitors. Both visitors and staff agreed that the median age of the visitors was between 35 and 44. However, staff estimated that over half (55%) of the visitors were between 35 and 44, while slightly less than one-third (32%) of the visitors reported being between 35 and 44.
- G. Park staff underestimated the number of nonresidents using the park. More visitors (19% vs 2%) said they were not Minnesota residents compared to staff estimates. Both visitors and staff agreed that residents of Minnesota had lived in Minnesota for over 20 years (78% vs 81%, respectively).
- H. Park staff underestimated the number of females using the park. Adult visitors were evenly divided between males and females (52% vs 48%, respectively). Staff estimated that 71% of the visitors were male.
- I. Park staff poorly estimated the occupations of adult visitors. Both visitors and staff agreed that the most common occupation of visitors was "professional/technical" (34% and 41%, respectively). The occupation rated second highest by staff was "manager" (18%) which was only checked by 6% of the visitors. One-third of the visitors (versus 5% of the staff) checked "homemaker" (12%), "student" (11%), or "retired" (11%).
- J. Park staff underestimated the educational achievements of adult visitors. Both visitors and staff indicated that the majority of visitors had attended college (74% and 69%, respectively). However, visitors

were better educated than staff estimated (22% vs 11% college graduates and 15% vs 4% graduate school).

K. Park staff poorly estimated the income level of visitors. The median income of visitors was \$30,000 - \$39,999 compared with the staff estimate of \$25,000 - \$29,999. Staff estimated that 87% of the visitors had incomes between \$20,000 and \$40,000, with 6% below \$20,000 and 7% above \$40,000. Forty-nine percent of visitors reported an income between \$20,000 and \$40,000, while 21% reported less than \$20,000 and 30% reported over \$40,000.

Why do visitors use the parks?

Considerable agreement was found between staff estimates and visitor responses in this area. Staff perceptions of how visitors feel about state parks and what visitors want in state parks mirror visitor feelings and desires.

Rank-order correlation was used to measure the relationship between visitors and staff in their respective ranking of what facilities and services should be in state parks. Rank-order correlation uses the relative rank (rather than the raw numbers) of a series of items in computing a correlation coefficient. The rank-order correlation coefficient ranges between -1 and +1, with the middle value of 0 indicating no relationship between the variables being compared. A correlation coefficient of +1 indicates a perfect relationship between two variables that increase (and decrease) together; a correlation coefficient of -1 indicates a perfect relationship between a variable that increases while the other variable decreases.

Rank-order correlation coefficients obtained in comparing staff estimates to visitor responses in the area of why people use state parks ranged from .7300 to .9232. These high correlation coefficients indicate high agreement between visitor responses and staff estimates of those responses. All of these correlation coefficients are statistically significant at .01, which means there is no more than a 1 in 100 probability that the correlation coefficients were due to chance.

The questions analyzed in this section deal with:

- A. Feelings about current visit
- B. Reasons for choosing a state park

- C. Sources of information about state parks
- D. Items important for an enjoyable visit
- E. Reasons for visiting a state park
- F. Enforcement practices
- G. Desirable facilities in a state park
- H. Undesirable facilities in a state park

A. Staff and visitors agreed that the current visit to a state park was favorable. They also agreed that visitors would visit another park and recommend the park to others. Both staff (94%) and visitors (94%) rated the visit as "mostly satisfying" or better. Visitors reported a higher satisfaction rating than staff estimated with 57% rating their visit as "completely satisfying" compared to 47% for the staff estimate. Staff estimated that 97% of the visitors would visit another park, and the visitors agreed (98%). Staff estimated that 100% of the visitors would recommend the park to others, and the visitors agreed (97%).

B. Staff and visitors agreed on ranking 15 reasons for choosing to visit a state park (correlation coefficient = .7929). They agreed on 4 of the 5 top reasons:

- Been before
- Natural features
- General area
- Near permanent home.

Visitors ranked "never been before" #5. Staff ranked "see wildlife" #5.

They also agreed on 4 of the 5 least important reasons:

- Interesting plants
- Fill Passport book
- Near friends
- Near seasonal home

Visitors also listed "attend programs", while staff also listed "never been before". (Note: "never been before" was in the top 5 for visitors and the bottom 5 for staff).

C. Staff and visitors agreed on ranking 15 sources of information on state parks (correlation coefficient = .8750). They agreed on 4 of the 5 top sources (with the same ranks):

Friends
Family
Brochures
Road maps.

Visitors ranked "other" #5 and staff ranked "highway signs" #5.

Staff and visitors only agreed on 3 of the 5 least important sources of information:

TV
Radio
Magazines.

Visitors also listed "highway info centers" and "newspapers" as unimportant. Staff also listed "other" and "DNR info center" as unimportant sources of information.

- D. Staff and visitors agreed on ranking 35 items for importance in making a park visit enjoyable (correlation coefficient = .7300). They agreed on 7 of 10 items as being most important, including the same top 5 (though the ranks varied):

Beauty of the park
Trails to walk and hike
Clean restrooms
Clean grounds
Campground facilities
Staff courtesy
Modern restrooms.

Visitors also checked "natural resources", "nature observation", and "Useable beach". Staff also checked "campground setting", "interpretive program", and "reserving campsites".

Staff and visitors only agreed on 6 of the 10 least important items:

Group center
Other
Power boating
Rental equipment
Group campground
Staff appearance.

Visitors also listed as unimportant:

- Boat access
- Reserving campsites
- Protection provided by ranger
- Staff knowledge of area.

Staff also listed as unimportant:

- Exhibits
- Information to read
- Beach safety
- Information brochures.

(Note: visitors had "reserving campsites" as unimportant - #29, while staff had "reserving campsites" as important - #9).

E. Staff and visitors agreed on ranking 32 reasons for visiting state parks (correlation coefficient = .9232). They agreed on 8 of the top 10 reasons:

- Enjoy scenery
- Peace and calm
- Enjoy nature
- Have fun
- Explore things
- Physically relax
- Participate with family
- Escape the daily routine.

Visitors also selected "exercise" and "study nature". Staff also selected "escape other demands" and "use equipment".

They also agreed on 8 of the 10 least important reasons:

- Be where the action is
- Others think highly of me
- Self confidence
- Share skills and knowledge
- Feel independent
- Observe other people
- Think about values
- Meet new people.

Visitors also listed "being creative" and "releasing inner feelings" as unimportant. Staff also listed "other reasons" and "saving money" as unimportant.

- F. Staff and visitors agreed on enforcement practices in the park. Both visitors (75%) and staff (78%) wanted no change in enforcement practices concerning alcoholic beverages. Both visitors (77%) and staff (65%) wanted no change in enforcement practices concerning pets. However, staff was slightly more favorable to restricting or prohibiting pets.
- G. Staff and visitors agreed on the ranking of 56 facilities and services that should (definitely yes/yes) be in state parks (correlation coefficient = .9107). They agreed on 9 of the top 10 most desirable facilities and services:

- Picnic area
- Hiking trails
- Walking paths
- Campgrounds
- Visitor center
- Picnic shelter
- Showers
- Flush toilets
- Interpretive programs.

Visitors also wanted "beach" and staff wanted "hot showers".

- H. Staff and visitors agreed on the ranking of 56 facilities and services that should not (definitely no/no) be in a state park (correlation coefficient = .8801). They agreed on 8 of the top 10 least desirable facilities and services:

- Amusement park rides
- Trails for motorized ORV's
- Hunting area
- Motel/lodge
- Game room
- Sport facility lights
- Dog training area
- Water ski rental.

Visitors also did not want "golf course" or "restaurant". Staff did not want "hang gliding area" or "lights along paths".

